

CLASSIC ROCK RATINGS

■■■■■■■■■■	A CLASSIC
■■■■■■■■■	EXCELLENT
■■■■■■■■	VERY GOOD
■■■■■■■	GOOD
■■■■■■	ABOVE AVERAGE
■■■■■	AVERAGE
■■■■	BELOW PAR
■■■	A DISAPPOINTMENT
■■	PANTS
■	PISH

EDITED BY IAN FORTNAM

14 PAGES

100% ROCK

THE HARD STUFF

The Ultimate
ROCK REVIEWS
Section

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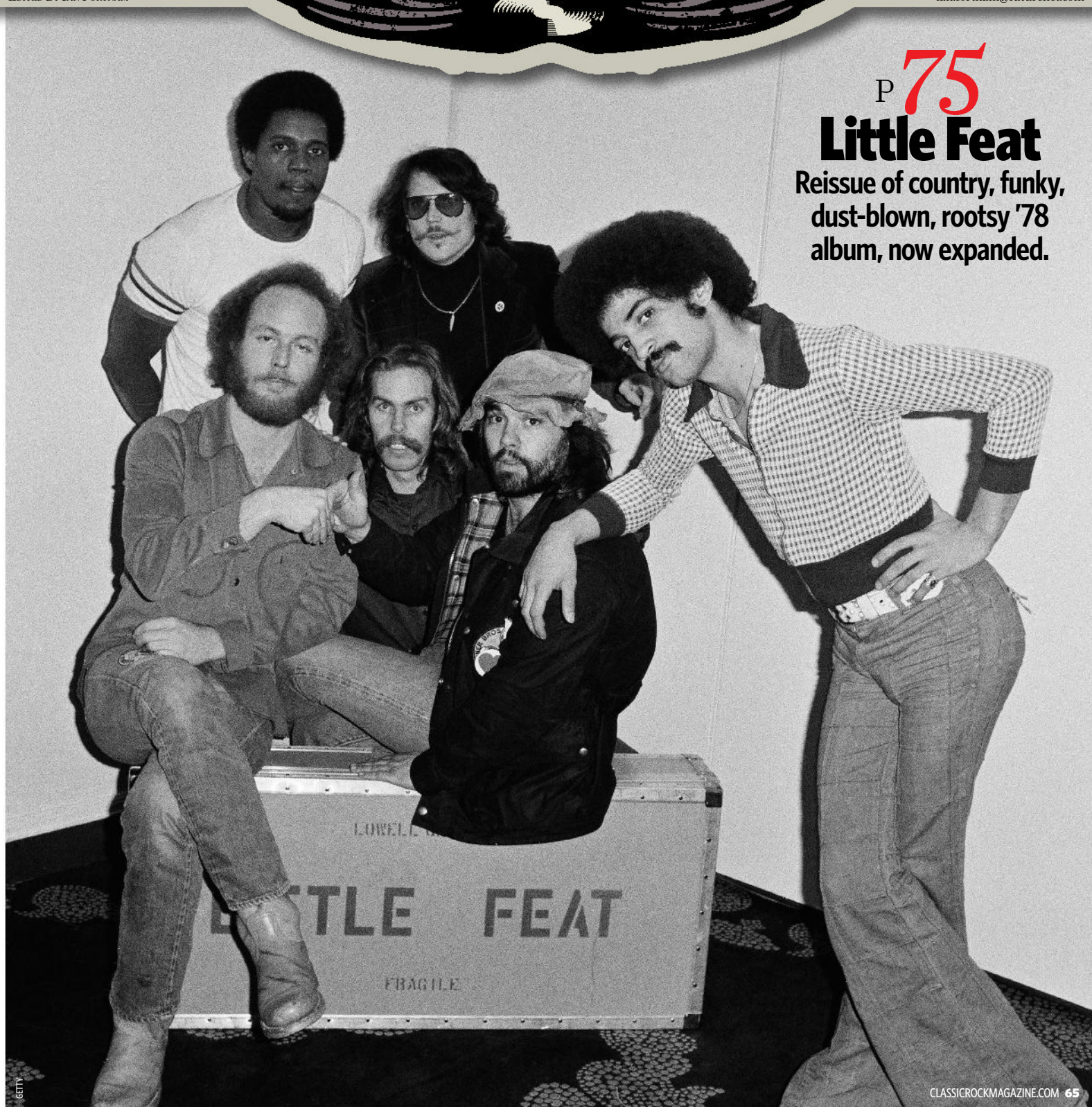
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Little Feat

Reissue of country, funky,
dust-blown, rootsy '78
album, now expanded.



THE HARD STUFF ALBUMS



Anthrax

XL NUCLEAR BLAST

Pioneer thrashers deliver pandemic-defying 40th-anniversary livestream.



The prospect of the band turning 40 in the middle of the pandemic must have caused more than a little consternation at Anthrax Towers. After all, the only way to do a momentous anniversary justice is to embark on a world tour. However, with gigs off the menu Scott Ian and co. had to think up other ways of marking their four decades of delivering the metal thrashing goods.

The celebrations began in May last year, culminating in a global livestream on July 16/17 during which the band pummelled their way through two hours-plus of fan-pleasing songs from the soundstage at The Den in Los Angeles, the recording of which very much lives up to its concise title. Everything about XL is huge. Here we have three discs: two CDs comprising the entire livestream plus three encore bonus songs, and a Blu-ray of the performance including the bonus songs, along with previously unseen rehearsal footage and Scott Ian providing an NYC walking tour of locations that are significant to the history of Anthrax. That's around 40 minutes of extra stuff to watch. Not bad.

The livestream might have taken place in front of just a handful of crew, but the unadulterated eruptive immensity of the performance is undiminished – the band play like they're lives depend on it, singer Joey Belladonna and bassist Frank Bello,

bass slung low, in the zone up front, and the veins popping out on Scott Ian's forehead as the classic riffs just keep on coming. Speaking of which, with the focus solely on Belladonna-fronted material (mostly from *Among The Living* and *Spreading The Disease*, natch) there are too many standout cuts to mention, and newer songs such as *Evil Twin* and *Blood Eagle Wings* hold their own against classics such as *Caught In a Mosh* and *AIR. Bring The Noise*, featuring special guest Chuck D, is especially exhilarating, as are the excellent encore bonus songs *Breathing Lightning*, *Efilnikufesin* (NFL) and *Discharge* cover *Protest And Survive*.

Of the other bonus material, the previously unseen rehearsal footage is not something you're ever likely to revisit, while Ian's Anthrax-history walk around New York City is far more fun, taking in locations including the Megaforce Records offices (seeking out original 24-track album tapes and collectible bourbon), the legendary club CBGB (now a clothing store), Joe's Pizza (famed for many a post-gig pit stop), Electric Lady Studios and Madison Square Garden.

With Anthrax's anniversary touring plans now back on track, XL is a timely reaffirmation of their legendary status.



Essi Berelian

The Cruel Intentions

Venomous Anonymous

INDIE RECORDINGS

Party hearty second album from Scandi-American sleaze rockers.



Four years is a long time for a band so focused on immediate

thrills to take to make their second album, but global events rather pressed 'pause' on everyone's fun. Yet it doesn't dull the impact of these Norwegian/Swedish LA-lovers' follow-up to their 2018 debut *No Sign Of Relief*.

The title track is a particularly powerful blast of Cathouse-era glam-metal, and while hints of thrash introduce *Reaper* it's only a preamble before a big, fat, 'woah-oh-oh'-backed chorus is broken out, and from there their hunger for mic-in-the-air anthemics is serviced repeatedly. *Sunrise Over Sunset* resembles Bryan Adams on a crack bender as it eulogises the titular thoroughfare, but while the melodic strokes are broad, they retain a fierce punk edge. *Chemical Vacation* is a particularly roaring tale of seeking refuge from too much of a good time, but you suspect they protest too much; they clearly can't get enough.



Johnny Sharp

Danny Beardsley

Chase The Sun

DANNYBEARDSLEY.COM

The riff remains the same.



There's no doubting Danny Beardsley's prowess as

a guitarist and singer-songwriter. A member of Midlands-based progressive instrumental trio The Parallax Method, this is his second solo album.

He excels at fierce, staccato riffs wrapped around powerful vocals and brief, cutting solos. Stand-out tracks are *Pulling Me Under*, and *Lonely Mile* with its thoughtful acoustic intro and neat vocal harmonies. But while he generally tries a different intro, he soon reverts to the same riffing style, which can become monotonous. And just when you think he is going to break out, as with the reggae beat he brings to *Reap What You Sow*, he's back to the solid riffs for the chorus, which is jarring. And recording the songs at the

same level with little variation in tone – instrumentally and vocally – reduces their impact after a while. Beardsley needs another pair of ears in the studio, making suggestions.



Hugh Fielder

Motorpsycho

Ancient Astronauts STICKMAN

Expansive, experimental live-in-the-studio masterwork.



Trondheim's Motorpsycho have been making eye-popping music

since the 90s, with each album or EP more expressive than the last. It's hard to convey the enormity of their mix of prog and psychedelic rock, although something like 2016's *Here Be Monsters* is probably as good a place as any to start if you're looking to have your metaphorical lid flipped.

Ancient Astronauts is a lockdown album like no other. It was originally devised in part for a piece by the Impure Dance Company, a few songs from which became the springboard for the AA album. The album comprises only four songs, one of which clocks in at 2:14 and another at 22:22, and it's magnificent, from full-blown fuzz-pedal rock monster to drones and shimmering interplay, highs and stupefying lows. As the PR says: "An explorative album without a whole lot of choruses."



Philip Wilding

Mickey Jupp

Up Snakes, Down Ladders

CONQUEST MUSIC

The greatest English rock'n'roller goes cross-country.



Typecasting Mickey Jupp as Southend's answer to Chuck Berry

don't get you a ride on Rage. Back in the 70s, even Lee Brilleaux from Dr Feelgood kneeled before him. Jupp offloaded the classic *Legend* albums, the famous *Flaming Red Boot* produced by Tony Visconti demanding attention. Ignored, Jupp went into semi-retirement in the Lake District.

He's been coaxed out by these home recordings, on which Lee Dorsey and Tom T Hall influences rub alongside Jerry Lee Lewis, Waylon 'n' Willie and such. Bar-room adultery (*Like You Don't Love Him*) and

unrequited love songs (*Loving The Wrong Girl*) are all over the piece, but *The Ballad of Tutford Darnell* (anag: Dartford Tunnel) is the charm. The atypical *Pilot*, recorded circa 1972, is like Joan Armatrading with a 99 and double flake.

Not a wasted word nor a pointless chord. Mickey Jupp is a total original.



Max Bell

Marc Valentine

Future Obscure ARCADE WIRE

Endlessly melodic solo album that feels like a greatest-hits collection.



As frontman with 90s nearly-rans Last Great Dreamers,

Marc Valentine never really broke through to connect with the wider audience that he and his glammed-up buddies sought to reach. It certainly wasn't for trying, but half the luck in making it as a rock star is in the timing, which explains why the clash of polka dots and scarves against parkas and sportswear didn't always work in his favour.

But with the passing of time comes a sense of acceptance. By kicking back, Marc Valentine has released a solo album that's simultaneously touching and gloriously rambunctious. The touchstone is still fuzzed-up rock'n'roll, but here it's shot

through with a sense of nostalgia and what might have been. Crucially, there's no bitterness or regret. The air-punching *Mornington Avenue* looks back through misty eyes, while *Break My Heart Anyway* is an anthem for eternal romantics everywhere, and joins these gems in a jewel case.

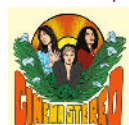


Julian Marszalek

Cinema Stereo

Cinema Stereo SELF-RELEASED

Exuberant, cleverly crafted Technicolor pop-rock.



Formed during the pandemic, this trio from Florida sound amazingly

accomplished considering their short existence. Imbued with the spirit of ELO, Cheap Trick and Queen, and playfully creative like Jellyfish, the amount of detail and care that's gone into tunes like orchestral break-up song *No More* and *Lady In Red Pt 1*, which starts off like Crüe's *Home Sweet Home* and travels via a Beatlesy string arrangement to an epic guitar solo, is hugely impressive. By contrast, *Lady In Red Pt 2* focuses on rocking out, as does the blues-rock driven *The Wine Song*. Top of the pop-rock pile, though, are *Ride This Thing Out* and the excellent *No One Needs Your Love (Like I Do)*, which wouldn't have been out of place

as hit singles blasting out of transistor radios on sunny beaches circa 1977.

A debut this packed with good stuff surely points to a great future for Cinema Stereo.



Essi Berelian

Rain City Drive

Rain City Drive THRILLER

New name, new beginning for pop-rockers formerly known as Slaves.



The choice of record label couldn't be more fitting, because

Waiting On You, the opener on Rain City Drive's debut album under their new name (they changed it from Slaves after the internet pointed out that their original moniker was a little problematic) sounds exactly like what would have happened if mid-90s Michael Jackson had fronted Linkin Park.

This is pop-rock with the emphasis on the pop, a collection of blemish-free, smooth-edged radio anthems that gleam like the wings of a freshly washed DeLorian. There's plenty of emo-flavoured soul baring and shirt-rending – 'I'm fucked up enough for the both of us,' new frontman (and *The Voice* runner-up) Matt McAndrew informs his beloved on the hip-hop tinged *Psycho*, an admission he should probably

leave off his Tinder profile. But at heart this is unashamedly big-business, by-committee radio rock, and every bit as catchy as that position in the musical world demands.



Emma Johnston

White Spirit

Right Or Wrong ONQUEST MUSIC

Turps versus Purps.



White Spirit were one of the New Wave Of British Heavy Metal's most

retro-sounding bands: more Purple than Pentagram, more Heep than Hellhammer. The Hartlepool group – famed for having included pre-Iron Maiden guitarist Janick Gers – released a single, self-titled album for MCA in 1980, then split while recording the follow-up with new singer Brian Howe.

The tapes for album number two, recently rediscovered, form the backbone of *Right Or Wrong*. Much re-recording and the employment of guest singers was required to bring the sonics up to scratch, but the results are impressive. Full of 80s-style pomp'n'roll, swaggering songs such as *Runaway*, *Wait A Little Longer* and *Holy Water* (with Steve Overland on vocals) would likely have been staples of the *Friday Rock Show* back in the day. Despite Howe's sporadic presence, *Right Or Wrong* also

serves as a fine tribute to the frontman who died in 2020 after storied stints with Ted Nugent and Bad Company.



Geoff Barton

Vanderwolf

12 Little Killers PROPER

Solo debut from former Last Man Standing singer/Meltdown Festival producer.



When Last Man Standing split during a traumatic 2012 tour of

Russia, gravel-voiced singer Max Vanderwolf became Glenn Max and began a back-room career producing live events, while intermittently continuing to write. Finally getting his act together, *12 Little Killers* is a dozen songs written between 2002 and 2018, newly recorded.

From the moment *I Am Not A Mountain* opens proceedings like The Jam in acoustic mode, it's a varied, vivacious collection where NYC rumbles along with Heartbreakers-style sleaze, and *Somebody's Love Song* is a ramshackle ballad that Dogs D'Amour might have covered. Best of all is the adventurous *Walking Away*, which builds slowly until it resurrects the all-guns-blazing David Bowie of *Rock'n'Roll Suicide*. There's a lot to take in, but it's a keeper.



John Aizlewood

ROUND-UP: BLUES

By Henry Yates

Marcus King Young Blood

AMERICAN RECORDINGS/REPUBLIC



Among blues musicians, citing Marcus King as the genre's great white hope is fast becoming an interview cliché to rival

"We just make music for ourselves, man." The acolytes aren't wrong, though, and this second solo album from the 26-year-old South Carolina guitarist is gritty, punchy and hooky, nodding to the fat-free power-trio format of the late-60s.

Produced in hands-off fashion by the Black Keys' Dan Auerbach, opener *It's Too Late* has you immediately with its clattering cardboard-box drums and the kind of ankle-biting riff that might have Jimmy Page's copyright lawyers fingering the red button (on that subject, we'll assume the distinct echo of Sugababes' *Good To Be Gone* is a pure accident). *Lie Lie Lie* is the best showcase for King's high, reedy, edgy vocals, while *Pain* is the standout guitar moment, the song's risk-taking warts-and-all solo a welcome tonic to the sickly polish of other upcoming gunslingers. Recent single *Hard Working Man* has the crossover chorus – and right now, nobody deserves one more.



Kirk Fletcher Heartache By The Pound

OGIEREA



It's the cask-aged mojo of the FAME Studios in Muscle Shoals, Alabama that marinates Fletcher's

often joyful, occasionally lugubrious seventh album. The wonderful *Afraid To Die*, *Too Scared To Live* is sold by his wild-honey vocal, while his clipped lead break on Albert King's *I've Made Nights By Myself* has a master's touch.



Laura Evans

State Of Mind ROSIE MUSIC



Laura Evans doesn't look like she'd bite, but album opener *I'm Alright* quickly disabuses you of that

notion, with its torn-up guitars and winning alley-cat yowl. It's one of several rough diamonds that work well: try the cludding beats of *Drag Me Back In*, or *Fire With Fire* for a suggestion of what Rumours-era Fleetwood Mac might have done next in a parallel universe.



Miraculous Mule Old Bones, New Fire

LIGHTNING ARCHIVE



Classic Rock called 2017's *Two Tonne Testimony* "the sound of a post-modern chain gang". Here the Mule

initially double down on that description, with frontman Michael J Sheehy kicking off *I Know I've Been Changed* borne only by his band's mournful moan. But twanger *Nobody Nothing* and *We Get What We Deserve* widen their net impressively.



Ian Siegal

Stone By Stone GROW VISION



Nobody puts you in the room like Siegal, and *Stone By Stone* is another argument for spit over polish, so

candidly produced that you hear the British bluesman's collaborators whooping and hollering like they're in the Nellcôte basement during the *Exile* sessions. Case in point is *The Fear*, a powerfully intimate strum that serves as an intervention to a wayward friend.



Marcus King: an album that's gritty, punchy and hooky.



Cats In Space

Kickstart The Sun HARMONY FACTORY

Melodic moggies race towards the light – mind that fur!

After decades spent hustling in the melodic rock trenches, it might be unkind to refer to Cats In Space mainman Greg Hart as a journeyman musician, but his CV does rather bear this out. It's 30 years since he co-wrote *Lay Down Your Arms* and *A Far Cry* on Asia's *Aqua* album, and the intervening years have been dotted with occasional albeit insubstantial flurries of activity. So when he launched *Cats In Space* in 2015 it felt like a Hail Mary. A final throw of the dice in AOR's last-chance saloon.

In the seven years since, Hart has worked with all the steely determination of a man who has finally figured out where he's headed and how he's going to get there, and desperately wants to make up for lost time. *Cats In Space* have released six studio albums (including a Christmas collection), a live album and a best-of collection. Which isn't bad for a band who've never troubled the Top 75. They're also on their third singer. It's the CV of a band staring down the retirement end of a 30-year career, and yet it feels, somehow, as if *Cats In Space* are really just getting started.

Album number six, *Kickstart The Sun* finds them ready to "turn the lights on"

after "the last two unprecedented years of darkness". These are clearly laudable aims, and my, what brightness they bring. Slicker than a freshly oiled salamander, it's an album that often sounds like a jukebox musical in search of a theatre, but it's all presented with such clear affection for the bands of yore that it feels churlish to suggest the band might be better off writing for the stage. There are hints of Queen, Toto, Foreigner and ELO – the end of *Last Dance Saloon* has more than a whiff of latter's *Turn To Stone* about it – and it's all performed with a nod and a wink and an enthusiasm that borders on glee.

It's also something of an everything-but-the-kitchen-sink production, from the fanfare horns that parp regally in *King Of Stars* to the climax of the title track, which sounds as if every singer in the galaxy has crowded into the studio. It's a master class in melodic songwriting, with harmonies ladled on top of harmonies and the simplest of piano flourishes powering *Poke The Witch* and *Smoke And Mirrors* to jubilant heights. This is an album that glistens.

Fraser Lewry



Dub War

Westgate Under Fire EARACHE

Reggae-metal firebrands' second chance to shine brightly.



It's difficult to shake off the feeling that if Dub War had been American

they would have been huge, and seen as peers of Rage Against The Machine. Unfortunately, being Welsh and arriving in the mid-90s, just as the UK developed an obsession with Britpop, the band's thrilling, fiery mix of metal, punk and ragga didn't fit in with the significantly less progressive narrative of the era. Frontman Benji Webbe went on to greater success with Skindred, but now he and his old compadres are back with their first album of new material since 1996's *Wrong Side Of Beautiful*.

And what a comeback it is, at once righteously furious (particularly on opener *Blackkk Man*, inspired by the murder of George Floyd) and deeply, magnificently groovy. From the straight-ahead banger *Vibes In The Place*, destined to rip the roof off any venue, to the grungy *Coffin Lid*, to an adrenalin-fuelled cover of Max Romeo And The Upsetters' *War In A Babylon* (featuring The Beat's Ranking Roger in his final ever recording), to a suitably romantic version of Marvin Gaye's *Stay Together*, *Westgate Under Fire* is a start-to-finish thrill that suggests Dub War's time might finally have arrived.

Emma Johnston

Osees

A Foul Form CASTLE FACE

High velocity punk rock obliterates all before it



Now on their zillionth release and fiftieth or so name change, Osees

show absolutely no signs of slowing down. You would of course be well within your rights to expect a dip in the quality-control department, but such is the deep well of inspiration that this venerable 21st-century institution draw from that their ability to cross-pollinate, mutate and claim as their own remains completely undiminished.

This time round, Osees – led by the ever restless and endlessly creative singer/guitarist John Dwyer – pay tribute to the punk rock of their youth. The result is a compact

and highly combustible album that packs 10 songs into just 22 minutes. Just as you're catching your breath from one detonation, another six-string explosion goes off to leave you reeling.

With titles such as *Fucking Kill Me* and *Scum Show*, Osees leave you in very little doubt as to where they're coming from.

Julian Marszalek

Kasabian

The Alchemist's Euphoria

SONY

New Kasabian, new mainstream outlook.

With songwriter Serge Pizzorno confidently stepping up to the role of frontman after former singer Tom Meighan's departure following domestic-abuse charges, it's all change at chez Kasabian. Also out is much of the celebratory electro lad-rock that made 2017's *For Crying Out Loud* an air-punching return to form, as Pizzorno pivots to synth-heavy, chart-friendly house, R&B and ambient rave textures on album number seven, with a drizzle of cosmic mysticism for flavour.

Mostly it's a poor fit. The Prodigy-like *Rocket Fuel* and rapper *Scriptvire* rollock along on hip-hop brass samples and urgent Arabian strings, and *Strictly Old School* is accomplished synthetic pop, but there's far too much of this sort of stuff around already to justify Kasabian diving in.

Come ambient rave meanders *Tuve* and *Star Gazer*, things really start to drag. As proven by the crackling *Alygatyry*, driving electro-pop like *Chemicals* and stirring ballads *The Wall* and *Letting Go*, Kasabian's USP has always been a cocky straddling of indie rock and rave. It's a shame they pretty much discard it here.

Mark Beaumont

Derek Sherinian

Vortex INSIDE OUT

The axemen cometh.



Versatile keyboard player Derek Sherinian has always

liked to feature prominent guitarists on his own albums, but this time he's gone overboard. Steve Stevens (currently in Billy Idol's band) buzzes restlessly all over the opening title track. He's followed by Extreme's Nuno Bettencourt, Joe Bonamassa and Steve Lukather in hard-rocking

tandem, Michael Schenker and Zakk Wilde, jazz-rock supremo Mike Stern and Sons Of Apollo (and ex-Guns N' Roses) man Bumblefoot, who plaster their varied talents over a range of 70s-influenced but modern-sounding fusion. It's difficult to be more specific, as Sherinian is a master of blending styles into the unexpected and uncategorisable, but the pounding rhythms of drummer/producer Simon Phillips and bassist Tony Franklin ensure none shall sleep.

■■■■■■■■■■■
Hugh Fielder

Josiah

We Lay on Cold Stone

HEAVY PSYCH SOUNDS

Massive, sprawling psychedelic stoner jams.



Brit riff-ramblers Josiah have always been the most ancient of

modern bands. Since their ascent in the early 2000s they've mined the proto-everything sounds of the late 60s to such utter perfection that there was no reason to believe they were anything but time travellers who got lost on their way to open on Uriah Heep's *Demons And Wizards* tour. After a not-so-brief hiatus when Josiah mainman Mathew Bethancourt formed dope-rock coalition Kings Of Frog Island,

the band re-formed during the pandemic for another trip to the Wayback Machine. And thank Christ for that.

Cold Stone is exactly what you'd want from these freewheeling freaks: epic hard-rocking, acid-gulping jams full of mind-expanding guitar fantasias and thunderous rhythms that sound like an army of wild camels decimating the city. If Monster Magnet slowly losing their minds on the set of *The Holy Mountain* sounds good to you, then get this record.

■■■■■■■■■■■
Sleazegrinder

Jack White

Entering Heaven Alive

THIRD MAN

The celebrated guitarist goes unplugged, with mixed results.



Arriving just months after *Fear Of The Dawn*, Jack White's latest

album finds the plank-spanking conceptualist dusting off his acoustic guitar and making a stylistic U-turn. It's a move that's sharply opposed to his current mélange of rock, hip-hop, prog and whatever else comes to hand. Here, the mood is more relaxed, with a bucolic twist that finds White reacquainting himself with melodies once again. The starkly beautiful *Love Is Selfish* evokes the era of the Stones' *Nellcôte*

adventures, while *A Tip From You To Me*'s harmonies and warmth bring humanity.

Unfortunately, a drop in quality control is evident at the album's midpoint. *I've Got You Surrounded* (*With My Love*) sounds like a remix of a half-formed idea, and the trite and lightweight *Queen Of The Bees* displays the need for some outside input and production discipline.

A fun album, but one in need of trimming and extra heft.

■■■■■■■■■■■
Julian Marszalek

Arthur Brown

Long Long Road MAGNETIC EYE

Still stoking the fire.

Released to coincide with his eightieth birthday, *Long Long Road* reveals the same attributes that made Arthur Brown's debut back in 1968 such an intriguing prospect: the multi-octave voice that soars and swoops, the progressive blues rock that encourages him to test his limits, and the wild flights of lyrical fantasy that keep you pinned to your chair.

'Come out of the toilet with your hands up and put down that bag of crisps or it's curtains for you,' he intones at the beginning of the short but wonderfully surreal *Coffin Confession*. Most of the rest of the album makes more sense, and *I Like Games* suggesting libidinally that Brown's flesh is not yet weak. The title track strikes

a reflective mood - 'The further we come the further we go'. Multi-instrumentalist Rik Patten has provided a relatively conventional musical framework that anchors Brown's florid momentum, although he too has his moments.

■■■■■■■■■■■
Hugh Fielder

Traitor

Last Hope For The Wretched

FIRST BLOOD FAMILY

Underground thrashers show how it should be done.



You have to admire bands with a singular vision and the metallic chops

to deliver it. Boasting shades of Mercyful Fate, Venom, Exciter, Slayer and sundry other early-80s thrash-centric bands, Traitor don't so much play as eviscerate their songs, such is the belligerent precision of their attack on the *Mad Max*-referencing *Drifter*, *Antietam* (their American Civil War epic) and the pile-driving *Why They Fear The Night*. Key to the band's success are the complementary vocals by guitarist Greg Lundmark and drummer Joe Rado and the band's unerring focus on making every riff land like a jackhammer uppercut. The effect is best on hypersonic opener *Sintroducer/Take Over* and the ripping *Baptized In Fire*. This is an album that absolutely

commands your attention, and sounds like the evolutionary step beyond *Kill 'Em All* had Metallica stuck to their early guns.

Old-skool thrash fans rejoice and get *Wretched*.

■■■■■■■■■■■
Essi Berelian

Five Finger Death Punch

AfterLife BETTER NOISE

Album nine is a reassuring-sounding body blow.



It might have escaped your notice, but Five Finger Death Punch have experienced more travails than Oliver Reed on a pub crawl.

Singer Ivan Moody, who struggles with addiction the way a cage fighter goes after an opponent, wasn't averse to the odd bar brawl himself, often getting in his own way as he and his band struggled to stay afloat.

AfterLife sees the band shedding their long-term guitarist. Not that you'd notice, as they haven't strayed far from their head-pummelling, densely melodic, dryly produced, hard-hitting stuff, and in a good way. The title track will cause a hockey arena full of punters to lose their minds, ditto the relentless *Gold Gutter*, eyes heavenwards, welcoming the familiar death from above.

■■■■■■■■■■■
Philip Wilding

ROUND-UP: MELODIC ROCK

By Dave Ling



Generation Radio: bringing classic 80s rock back to life.

Generation Radio

Generation Radio FRONTIERS



When the Grammy-winning Rascal Flatts wrapped a 20-year career in 2021, many wondered what their bassist/keyboard player/vocalist/songwriter and producer Jay DeMarcus might do next. Little did they know, this was pretty much a done deal. By the

time the trio were officially over, Generation Radio had already debuted live in Nashville.

The line between country music and AOR is increasingly blurred, and joining DeMarcus in this promising unit are two icons of melodic hard rock: Jason Scheff, a vocalist and bassist with Chicago for three decades-plus, and drummer/vocal powerhouse Deen Castronovo (Journey, Revolution Saints), plus guitarists Chris

Rodriguez and Tom Yankton. Even at 60, Scheff remains a superlative singer, and with support from Castronovo, from the swoon-inducing *Why Are You Calling Me Now* to the frailty of *Finally Got It Right*, Generation Radio's commitment to "bringing classic 1980s rock back to life" is unmistakable.

Lovers of Chicago, Journey and, yes, Rascal Flatts, this album is for you.

■■■■■■■■■■■

Sarayasign

Throne Of God MELODIC PASSION



Jesper Lindbergh dreamed up the concept of the Saraya almost 25 years ago, and over a planned

course of four albums the Swede finally brings the saga to life. Act one, *Throne Of God*, is a work of stunning ambition, with world-class vocals, intelligent arrangements and a compulsion to push the envelope beyond a run-of-the-mill commercial hard rock act.

■■■■■■■■■■■

Compass

Theory Of Tides ESCAPE MUSIC



Led by Steve Newman of the British band Newman, Compass provide an escape valve for material

considered a little too weighty or progressive for the Newman blueprint. This second Compass album, a concept piece about the iconic 16/17th-century astronomer and scientist Galileo Galilei, was produced and mixed to pomp-perfection by Lionheart's Steve Mann.

■■■■■■■■■■■

Nordic Union

Animalistic FRONTIERS



Three albums into their partnership, Pretty Maids singer Ronnie Atkins and human dynamo Erik

Mårtensson continue to produce fireworks. Via his output with Eclipse and W.E.T., Mårtensson has forged a distinctive writing and production style, which continues here with *In Every Waking Hour*, *Scream* and the power ballad *Riot*.

■■■■■■■■■■■

Jimi Jamison

Rock Hard JCONCLASSIC



More than 30 years after being recorded and shelved, the long-lost solo debut from the late, great former Survivor frontman has surfaced. Though much of it was re-recorded, re-purposed or bootlegged, it's wonderful to have these songs in one place, just as Jamison intended, and includes a rare version of Survivor's *Ever Since The World Began* from Sly Stallone's movie *Lock Up*.

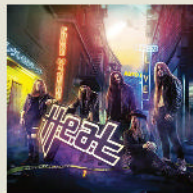
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H.e.a.t.

Force Majeure EARMUSIC

The classics never go out of style for this old-school Swedish crew.



Between *Top Gun*'s eternally irritating hero Maverick ruling the big screen once more, Kate Bush topping the charts, Russia going mad and threatening nuclear war, the possibility of recession hanging over our heads, and acid-wash jeans regaining popularity among the young and the fashionable, it seems that the 80s are back with a vengeance. This is excellent news for old-school Swedish crew H.e.a.t., because they wear their allegiance to the decade proudly on their denim, patch-adorned sleeve.

Force Majeure, their seventh album, marks the return of their original frontman, Kenny Leckremo, following the departure of *Swedish Idol*-winner Erik Grönwall, and the intervening years have clearly been kind to him, as he hits those Dio-inspired high notes like a baseball champ knocking the ball out of the park over and over again.

While the band attempted to experiment a little more on recent albums, this time there's absolutely no messing about. *Force Majeure* is as straight-talking, no-nonsense as it gets, a towering love letter to the most classic of rock. Album highlight and lead single *Nationwide* is on a highway to the danger zone, a high-octane celebration of like-minded crowds coming together to sing along – it might not actually be on the new *Top Gun*

soundtrack, but spiritually that's exactly where it belongs, backing an enthusiastic game of beach volleyball.

Guitars duel, riffs are given free rein to widdle away into infinity and beyond, vocal harmonies speak of an unbreakable brotherhood grounded in noise, beers and shampoo. *Tainted Blood* is just a backwards-looped drum track away from Def Leppard in their stadium-shagging pomp, a call-and-response chorus backing Leckremo's window-shattering wail, while *One Of Us* allows a bit of a breather with the obligatory tortured, lighter-waving ballad complete with a Slash-style guitar solo. All the boxes have been ticked.

What's infectious about this album is that the band sound like they're having such insane levels of fun. It's like witnessing a puppy bounding around showing off its favourite new stick – if it doesn't make you smile you must be at least a little bit dead inside. H.e.a.t. are not cool, and they don't want to be. Cool is boring. It's restrictive. It's overrated. Better to be the cake-fuelled kid running around in circles giggling until you're dizzy and feeling a bit sick than the one sitting back looking down its nose at those joining in with the party. Join the gang and ride that wave of nostalgia.

★★★★★

Emma Johnston

Arch Enemy

Deceivers CENTURY MEDIA

Serious death metal Swedes indulge their symphonic Eurovision side.



Fronted by straight-edge Canadian vegan Alissa White-Gluz,

Swedish melodic death metallers Arch Enemy make unlikely recruits to Satan's stampeding stormtrooper hordes.

Edging ever closer to the delirious pomposity of symphonic metal, these veteran Nordic nihilists sound both technically precise and comically preposterous on their eleventh studio album, but with a ferocious hardcore edge that makes them difficult to dismiss as pure pantomime. As White-Gluz swerves effortlessly between clean pop-rock vocals and guttural porcine grunting while ex-Carcass guitarist Michael Arnott cranks out the overdriven multi-tracked flamethrower fretwork, thunderous electro-orchestral battle anthems like *Deceiver*, *Deceiver* and *Spreading Black Wings* blur the line between Eurovision uber-kitsch and turbo-trash avant-punk extremism. There is wistful Celt-pop yearning here too, amid all the gravel-voiced bellowing. Indeed, spangled folk-metal epics like *The Watcher* and *Poisoned Arrow* could almost be Enya, albeit a fire-breathing, nail-gargling, skull-splitting version of Enya shat forth from the rank-smelling depths of Beelzebub's very own flame-grilled anus. In other words, fun for all the family.

★★★★★

Stephen Dalton

Screeching Weasel

The Awful Disclosures Of

TRIPED/RUM BAR

Always the pop-punk bridesmaids.



Even before he was cancelled by the cool kids' punk scene, Ben

Foster's Screeching Weasel were marked down for life as also-rans. They're regarded for their influential Ramones-meets-Descendents style that informed the lesser talents of Blink-182, Fall Out Boy, Taking Back Sunday and other landfill pop-punk formulaic enough to make even a 12-year-old wince. Nevertheless, classic Weasel albums *My Brain Hurts*, *Anthem*

For A New Tomorrow and *Bark Like A Dog* keep Screeching Weasel's ledger in credit.

The Awful Disclosures Of doesn't match those heights, but thankfully neither does it reinvent the trademark bittersweet Weasel wheel, and aims high with the stirring, riff-heavy *Just Another Fool*, *Pandora's Eyes* and *Tell Me Your Lies*.

Having outlived the duration of the Ramones' career by 13 years and one album, Foster has now vowed that the continually splitting/re-forming Screeching Weasel will die when he does. So strap yourselves in, we're here for the long haul.

★★★★★

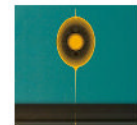
Alex Burrows

The Utopia Strong

International Treasure

ROCKET

A beautifully realised journey through inner space.



I can't quite imagine what a night back at the Utopia Strong's house

might entail. I'm imagining a living room set somewhere in the 1970s with Willy Wonka having had a hand in the décor, but whatever hue the wallpaper might take on, or the abundance of lava lamps taking up the hallway, you'd know that whoever was spinning the tunes – be it Steve Davis, Kavus Torabi or Mike York – the end of the evening would at least be an exercise in orchestrated bliss.

International Treasure is a familiar mix of the unfamiliar, which is to say uncharted sounds shifting in elliptical patterns, wave upon wave of electronic and psychedelic sound undulating in a world uninhibited by boundaries but not without structure. These songs do have somewhere to go, but no sense of urgency in getting there. This is all about the journey, and what a trip it is.

★★★★★

Philip Wilding

Nebula

Transmissions From Mothership Earth

HEAVY PSYCH SOUNDS

Long-lost space surfers touch back down in the nick of time.



Nebula's status in the pantheon of modern rock'n'roll has been tragically

eroded over the ensuing decades. At the dawn of the

millennium they were denim-clad gods stalking the Earth, the glorious result of guitarist Eddie Glass stepping away from van riders Fu Manchu to explore the wild and woolly world of hairy-scary acid-psych. Back in '99 there was no one more way out than Nebula, and they inspired countless others to explore strange new aural vistas.

After a good 10-year nap, the band sauntered back in town to reclaim their stoner-king throne with 2019's *Heavy Shit*. Now the bruising, woozing *Transmissions* only asserts their dominance. Thunderous piles of throbbing fuzz, oozing waves of lysergic syrup, weird vibes and heavy riffs all coalesce in this cinematic trip through UFO crash-landings, werewolf biker orgies and Saturday-night psychotic breakdowns. They've got a song here called *Melt Your Head*. It's quite literal. Hot damn.

■■■■■■■■■■■
Sleazegrinder

Thundermother

Black And Gold AFM

The highs and lows of a life in rock'n'roll from Scandi quartet.



It seems that Sweden is enjoying quite the hard-rock revival this

summer. While their fellow countrymen H.e.a.t. have returned with a full-tilt blast of unrefined hard rock on their new album (reviewed on page 70), Thundermother are coming from a similar standpoint but with more in the way of subtlety.

With countless 'woah-oah's and the use of a Bon Jovi-style talk-box, *Black And Gold* glides along on a wave of singalong arena rock, especially in the joyous *Raise Your Hands*, celebrating the search for self-made nuggets of glamour in life even when times are hard. But for every air-punching anthemic chorus there's a moment of reflection, as in the rolling blues rock of *Hot Mess* (described by the band as "Aerosmith-meets-Aretha Franklin"), which allows singer Guernica Mancini to wring every drop of emotion from her soul. *Borrowed Time*, meanwhile, offers a surprisingly downbeat ending, a portrait of the crash in mood that comes when the show is over and it's time to deal with your own self-doubt. With a gleaming melody contrasting and complementing the gloom, it brings to mind a song by another of their country's top exports,

ABBA's *The Winner Takes It All*, reinvented and beamed through a classic-rock prism. There's a lot more going on in *Black And Gold* than it at first suggests.

■■■■■■■■■■■
Emma Johnston

Bernie Marsden

Trios CONQUEST MUSIC

Honouring guitar heroes with power-trio covers.



After his blues tribute albums *Kings* and *Chess*, Bernie Marsden now

recreates tracks by his favourite guitarists leading power trios, using his own three-piece completed by drummer Jimmy Copley (who passed away in 2017) and bassist David Levy (who was with Rory Gallagher on his final tours). The sessions date from 2007 but are previously unreleased.

The oldest song here, *Outside Woman Blues* – first recorded by 'Blind' Joe Reynolds in 1929 – is covered in homage to Clapton as on Cream's *Disraeli Gears* in 1967. From that same year comes Peter Green rarity *Driftin' Blues*, which he recorded alongside Mick Fleetwood and John McVie pre-Fleetwood Mac, and Hendrix's *Spanish Castle Magic*. *Drifting*, a later, post-Experience Hendrix track, signals Marsden's nose for the connoisseur's choice. Likewise his Gallagher cover (Taste's *Same Old Story*) and Jeff Beck tribute (Don Nix's *Black Cat Moan*, recorded in '73 by Beck, Bogert & Appice). The other trios revisited starred Robin Trower, Joe Walsh, Leslie West and Johnny Winter, before the album closes with a new take on Cozy Powell's *Na Na Na* (featuring one B Marsden, and a hit in 1974).

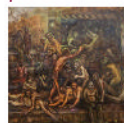
In all, another master class in rock history.

■■■■■■■■■■■
Neil Jeffries

Candy

Heaven Is Here RELAPSE

Noisy US quintet push the post-hardcore envelope.



Citing veteran hardcore and metalcore icons like Minor Threat, Cro-Mags and Hatebreed as key inspirations, Brooklyn-based quintet Candy play blasting rock that is simple, direct, politically angry and fucking loud.

After a four-year gap, *Heaven Is Here* is a reliably rowdy

bucking-bronco beast that bends and stretches the parameters of heavy music with bursts of electronic crackle, ear-bleeding noise and exotic sonic textures. Most of the stand-out tracks defy regular rock dynamics, from eerie industrial noisecore incantation *Kinesthesia* to ferocious electro-metal stomper *Transcend To Wet* and the 10-minute psych-punk epic *Perverse*. In fairness, splenetic garage-punk rage is the band's default setting, but even these tracks contain hidden twists. The winningly titled *World Of Shit* is a pretty standard guitar slammer, until the sound of a cat being attacked by a swarm of robot bees kicks in midway through, elevating the jaunty melody considerably.

A mostly exhilarating, agreeably disagreeable racket.

■■■■■■■■■■■
Stephen Dalton

Rusty

The Resurrection Of Rust

EMI/CAPITOL

Elvis Costello's first band finally make their debut album.



Before Elvis Costello, before The Attractions and long before The Imposters,

there was Rusty, in which young Declan MacManus plied his trade around the pubs of Liverpool, with limited success.

Fifty-one years after their formation, Rusty's co-leader Allan Mayes suggested a live reunion. MacManus (now Costello, of course) declined, but was open to the pair recording six Rusty songs with The Imposters: two originals (including *Maureen & Sam*, which Costello would exhume for New Amsterdam's B-side, *Ghost Train*) and four covers.

The good-natured, twangsome results prefigure Costello's more angsty work with Clover on the Nick Lowe-produced *My Aim Is True*. They're at their best on the terrific, harmony-drenched *Don't Lose Your Grip On Love*, one of two songs that Lowe wrote for Brinsley Schwarz, and a feisty entwining of Neil Young's *Everybody Knows This Is Nowhere* and *Dance Dance Dance*. Mayes offers an affecting, grizzled take on Jim Ford's *I'm Ahead If I Can Quit While I'm Behind*, but the real delight is another MacManus original, the wistful *Warm House (And An Hour Of Joy)*, a template for the magic to come.

■■■■■■■■■■■
John Aizlewood

BEST OF THE REST

Other new releases out this month.

Clamm

Care MEAT MACHINE

Joining the current glut of attitude-driven, post-punk intensity presently bursting out of Australia (NWOANW, anyone?), this Melbourne trio blaze undeniably with desperate Saints thuggery, casual swagger and an occasionally skronking No Wave sax. **7/10**

GWAR

The New Dark Ages PIT

The gore-spattered Virginian shock-schlockers' second album following the 2014 death of leading light Dave Brockie, which left them an enthusiastic Trigger's broom of hand-me-down panto-metal cliché, offers profane techno-thrash with prog ambitions. Mostly harmless. **6/10**

Dune Rats

Real Rare Whale BMG

You'd have to be quite the miserable bastard to hate this: indomitably cheerful, earworm-infested, post-SoCal fratcore that bounces out of the speakers like a drunk puppy at the beach. You can actually hear the grins on the gang vocals. Australian? Obviously. **7/10**

The Fernweh

Torschlusspanik! WINTERLUDE

Lush, ambitious, Liverpool-born, post-everything, quintessentially Anglo psych-pop-prog hobbled by a confounding title. Luckily it's great. Byrdsian XTC-ishness abounds. Mature, intelligent, pun-laced aspirations. Floyd with a sense of fun. But in a good way. **8/10**

Traams

Personal Best FAT CAT

A tremendously engaging laboratory of sound benefits from a succession of idiosyncratic guest vocalists, Protomartyr's Joe Casey brings a hectic Fall vibe to *The Light At Night*, while Soffie Viemose ramps up the mesmeric Kosmische atmos on *Sleeper*. Vibey. **7/10**

Soulfly

Totem NUCLEAR BLAST

Twelfth album in 25 years from the metal stalwarts (and their first with Arthur Rizk who replaced guitarist Marc Rizzo) finds Max Cavalera and co-writing drummer son Zyon on furiously fine form. Vanilla thrash by comparison to early Soulfly, but headspinningly intense. **8/10**

Besvärjelsen

Atlas MAGNETIC EYE

Swedish 'forest rockers', eh. Who even knew this was a thing? Whatever, *Atlas* is sound stuff. Titanic, dynamic, cinematic, reliably heavy, yet eminently accessible. Lea Amling Alazam occasionally recalls Siouxsie, if more reliably (whisper it) in tune. Bewitching. **8/10**

Amongst Liars

Amongst Liars EARACHE

Calling to mind QOTSA isn't exactly a rare attribute among 21st-century rock bands, but with Eastbourne's Amongst Liars it's only the beginning of the story. There's a distinctive collation of nicely curated modern rock tropes. And they've got actual tunes, which is always a bonus. **7/10**

Quiet Confusion

Magella GO DOWN

Bands often self-identify as something they're actually not. Italy's Quiet Confusion think they've made a stoner album laced with fuzz and 70s psych. They haven't. They're better than that. This is fleet-footed and groovy, blues-infused indie ingenuity. Which is confusing, but never quiet. **8/10**

Somnus Throne

Nemesis Lately HEAVY PSYCH SOUNDS

Doubtless destined to be indexed in the *Pharmacopeia Metallica* alongside Dead Meadow and Sleep, LA-based trio Somnus Throne deliver vast, Quaalude-flavoured, edifice-sized riff-propelled fuzz-outs while 1,000-yard loll-gazing the living shit out of their shoes. Righteous. **7/10**